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LITERARY ARTICULATIONS OF ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER AND MILD AUTISM IN PERRAULT'S *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD*

Lavinia Horner

In 1697, Charles Perrault published the fairy tale *Le petit chaperon rouge* in the collection of tales titled *Histoires, ou contes du temps passé avec des moralitez*, and along the years this fairy tale has become the subject of various interpretations. Many critics depict it as a warning to children that strangers can hurt them, others portray Little Red Riding Hood either as a sexually promiscuous or as a naive young girl, while some interpretations break through these overused depictions.[1] However, no attention has been paid to the articulations of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)/Mild Autism symptoms that are employed by Perrault in the story in order to bring to life Little Red Riding Hood's character. This article follows an interdisciplinary approach and relies on developmental psychology and close reading to demonstrate that Perrault's *Le petit chaperon rouge* contains literary articulations of what we now cluster under the ADHD/Mild Autism spectrum.

A focus on the pathology of Little Red Riding Hood's behavior leads to novel interpretations that move beyond moral teachings regarding socially appropriate or inappropriate behavior. In the fairy tale, Little Red Riding Hood acts differently than might be expected—she does not stay on the track designated for her, she gets distracted by nature, she stops and talks to strangers, and she does not recognize the intent of the disguised wolf who previously warned her that it was going to race her to her grandmother's house. These are social behaviors that we now understand to result from developmental challenges. Before moving to the detailed analysis of Little Red Riding Hood's behavioral profile, this article will briefly present selected versions of the fairy tale that follow the approach by the brothers Grimm.[2] Consequently, we will note that Little Red Riding Hood survives in all these adaptations. Since in Perrault's version the heroine dies, I investigate behavioral profiles that lead to her survival in order to demonstrate that the young girl's behavior plays a central role in the survival process. In addition to these selected versions, the article will also concisely bring into discussion interpretations in circulation that deviate from Perrault's *moral* approach, yet still do not explore the young girl's behavior from a pathological perspective. Instead, they focus on mythological, psychoanalytical and political aspects[3] of Perrault's fairy tale.

Death or survival

Le petit chaperon rouge has known various versions throughout the years, and these adaptations targeted numerous audiences. In Perrault's version,[4] Little Red Riding Hood's character is vulnerable, given the ADHD and Mild Autism-like symptoms that she displays. Since the young girl is on her own and distractible, the villainous wolf is able to prey on her vulnerabilities. At the end of the story, the sum of these vulnerabilities leads to her death. In the Grimms's version, the heroine's survival occurs due to external help as the woodcutter kills the wolf and saves the girl. Similar to the Grimms's version, in the subsequent versions that will be analyzed in this section, Little Red Riding Hood also survives. We will observe that her survival is linked to occasional external help, but also to her ability to stay alert and focused.

In Jacques Ferron's version (1968), both the young girl and her grandmother survive the wolf's visit. However, unlike the Grimms's version, Ferron's version does not attribute Little Red Riding Hood's survival to the bravery of a male character, but to the courage of the girl's pet as well as to her own ability to focus. Ferron begins his fairy tale with a passage regarding Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, described as a strong and independent woman : "Une vieille dame, qu'on avait beaucoup chaperonnée en sa jeunesse avec le résultat qu'elle avait épousé un homme autoritaire dont elle était veuve, Dieu merci, achevait ses jours sans surveillance, libre et heureuse, dans un petit bungalow à l'Abord-à-Plouffe" (223). Like her grandmother, Ferron's Little Red Riding Hood appears to have an assertive personality—unlike Perrault's heroine–and her grandmother confesses that the young girl intimidates her (223). It is also interesting to observe that, when discussing with her grandmother, the young heroine mimics the responses that we are used to hearing from the wolf in Perrault's fairy tale, thus signaling that roles will change and that *she* will be the dominant character in this fairy tale: "Alors elle reprenait en fausset des rengaines: 'Que tu as de belles joues, mon enfant ! – C'est pour mieux rougir, grand-maman. – De belles lèvres ! – Pour mieux ouvrir la bouche, grand-maman" (223-24).

As in many situations where superheroes have pet helpers during their quest, Ferron's young heroine also receives a dog that joins her on the way to the grandmother. The story follows the well-known plot: the girl meets and talks to the wolf, then each of them continues their journey to the grandmother's house. The dog decides to let the girl travel alone; however, it also announces to her that it will run to the house and wait for her to arrive. Unlike Perrault's character, Ferron's Little Red Riding Hood does not get distracted by butterflies, flowers and hazelnuts during her journey. As a reward for her focused behavior, Ferron's heroine does not find the wolf in the grandmother's bed as happens in Perrault's version. On the contrary, upon her arrival, Little Red Riding Hood encounters a feeble wolf already chased away by her dog (226).

The Moroccan writer Tahar ben Jelloun presents us with still another version of Little Red Riding Hood under the title *La petite à la burqa rouge* in his collection *Mes contes de Perrault*. Unlike Perrault's version, we observe that the author gives the young girl a name and a burqa head cover: "Il était une fois une petite paysanne d'une beauté éblouissante, qui s'appelait Soukaïna" (49). The

forest does not represent the chosen setting for this story, but instead we find a chaotic world of armed men where political tensions are on the rise: "C'était l'époque où des hommes barbus, vêtus de tuniques noires, armés de sabres et de fusils, faisaient la loi et persécutaient les hommes qui ne fréquentaient pas assidument la mosquée, lapidaient les femmes qui osaient les défier en portant des tenues légères" (49). Tahar ben Jelloun's version appeared in 2014, and the author declared in an interview with Patrick Simonin that even though the discourses existent in *Mes contes de Perrault* are metaphors, they also describe events that are contemporary (*Interview minute 1:40*). If, in Perrault's version, the heroine encounters a wolf, in Tahar ben Jelloun's, *La petite à la burqa rouge,* the wolf's character is replaced by a man who suspects that Soukaïna is a rebel because red represents the color of revolt: "Ne sais-tu pas que le rouge est la couleur de la révolte?" (51). By bringing into discussion the girl's possible rebellious behavior, the man anticipates that Soukaïna will indeed adopt towards the "wolf" an attitude different from the one found in Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Once he is at the grandmother's house, the armed man kills Soukaïna's grandmother and waits for her to arrive. Unlike Perrault's version, when the man begins to speak, the girl immediately becomes aware that it is not her grandmother's voice and that the man is a sexual predator and murderer. Consequently, she remains calm, does not reveal her discovery, and secretly plots a way to escape danger. As she cannot find a knife to kill the man, she skillfully attempts to convince the "wolf" to eat something else: "Oh, grand-mère, veux-tu me raconter l'histoire du loup végétarien?" (54). This question—perceived as defiant—triggers the man's anger, and he attacks the young girl. Not only does Soukaïna manage to escape, but she finds the courage to mock him: "'Tu te dis musulman! Pauvre islam! Tu n'es pas digne d'entrer dans cette religion. Tu n'es qu'un obsédé sexuel avec un tout petit zizi même pas capable de faire envie. Tu es laid et puant, tu es une petite chose sans importance, un assassin …'" (55-56). Eventually, the man falls on his own knife and sees this accident as divine punishment for his sins: "'Dieu m'a puni, je me suis donné un coup moi-même avec mon poignard … c'est une punition divine …'" (57). The fairy tale ends with an exchange of reflections between the young girl and her teacher. To the teacher's affirmation that "L'homme est un loup pour l'homme" (57), the heroine replies: "L'homme est un homme pour l'homme", thus suggesting that animals do not need to be used as images of evil and that human beings will suffice. We can conclude that Tahar ben Jelloun's version, which takes Perrault's moral and warnings seriously,[5] nonetheless transforms the character of Little Red Riding Hood into a self-sufficient heroine by portraying her as alert, focused and able to decode intent.

In a Korean version of the *Little Red Riding Hood* titled *Pooh! How Did She know? The Story of a Little Red Riding Hood Who Escaped from Her Abductors*, [6] Mia Sim mingles characters, thus presenting us with a plot where Little Red Riding Hood, the Three Little Pigs, the Frog Prince and a Cat in a Car meet and interact. In this version, Little Red Riding Hood escapes from her abductors and her survival is linked to her mother's teachings,[7] but also to her ability to quickly decode danger. According to Sandra Beckett's analysis of this version of the fairy

tale: "At the first encounter, Little Red Riding Hood merely remembers what her mother told her, whereas at the second, she is also able to perceive the danger, to reflect, and to react. She seems to sense instinctively that the Frog Prince's intentions are malicious" (*Revisioning* 42). Mia Sim's representation of Little Red Riding Hood allows us to better compare the focused heroine that she created with Perrault's vulnerable heroine. Just as Sim's Little Red Riding Hood was able to interpret the villains' malicious intentions, Perrault's heroine should have also been able to decode other characters' intentions at her age. Additionally, with or without her mother's advice, Perrault's heroine should have also tried to react and defend herself before the wolf killed her. According to Sandra Beckett, the Korean author was determined to create a Little Red Riding Hood who was not distractible and vulnerable and whose life did not depend on taught moral values, but rather on her own self-sufficient behavior (*Revisioning Red Riding Hood around the World* 42).

The Little Red Riding Hood depicted in Sim's fairy tale compares what she is told by the villains with what she can observe on her own. Consequently, when she remarks that the Frog Prince's statements do not align with her logic, she skillfully avoids the trap set for her: "'Little Red Riding Hood, help me!', said the Frog Prince.[8] 'My ball has fallen in the water.' 'A golden ball?' 'Yes. Can you get it? You are strong, eh?' […] I noticed then that it was a little odd. In fact, the Frog Prince is stronger than me. But why did he ask me to help him? 'Sorry. I can't help you!' I told him" (*Revisioning* 43). Unlike Perrault's heroine, Sim's Little Red Riding Hood surpasses surface observations–such as someone's appearance–and she focuses more on behavior that appears odd. Moreover, she can quickly adapt her behavior when she considers that something could endanger her life even though she initially attempts to appear fearless. As an example, when the Three Little Pigs suggest that she should take a poorly lit road, she begins to doubt their good intentions and, unlike Perrault's heroine, she considers that it is wiser to change her path: "Then I stopped to think. Mom told me a poorly lit road is dangerous. I told the three little pigs: 'I'm not afraid. But I will take the other lit road!'" (43). As demonstrated by her actions throughout the story, Sim's character seems to be able to skillfully decode intentions, to detect patterns and to safely arrive at her grandmother's house. Unlike Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood, she does indeed benefit from the magic of her mother's voice that seems to follow her wherever she goes. Nevertheless, she does not rely only on her mother's voice, but also on her ability to sense bad intentions.

As seen in the examples presented so far, *Le petit chaperon rouge* has known numerous variations, but the child, the mother, the villain(s) as well as the grandmother are usually a constant. According to Alan Dundes, *Le petit chaperon rouge* remains one of the most prevalent fairy tales to this day:

> The story of a little girl who wears a red hood or cape and who carries a basket of food and drink to her grandmother is one of the most beloved and popular fairy tales ever reported. The girl, called 'Le petit chaperon rouge' in French, 'Rotkäppchen' in German, and 'Little Red Riding Hood' in English, invariably encounters a villainous wolf in European versions of the tale (ix).

However, depending on the behavioral profile created for Little Red Riding Hood, we notice that she will die, or she will survive at the end of the fairy tale. In addition to these versions of the story, we can also track down numerous interpretations. Consequently, I will now briefly reference three popular interpretations in circulation that focus on mythological, psychoanalytical and political aspects of Perrault's *Le petit chaperon rouge*. While all these perspectives open a door to many possible ways of investigating this popular fairy tale, I will demonstrate that they focus more on seventeenth-century social dynamics or on decoding imagery and symbols rather than on analyzing Little Red Riding Hood's behavior from a pathological angle.

Little Red Riding Hood: Interpretations in circulation

When addressing the topic of interpretations related to Little Red Riding Hood, we must note that Charles Perrault himself was the first to add a *Morals* section at the end of his fairy tale where he offers warnings about the dangers of sweet-talking males. Bruno Bettelheim does not appreciate Perrault's intent to explain the meaning of the story. According to Bettelheim, Perrault's interpretation cannot and should not be an exhaustive one:

> Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" loses much of its appeal because it is so obvious that his wolf is not a rapacious beast but a metaphor, which leaves little to the imagination of the hearer. Such simplifications and a directly stated moral turn this potential fairy tale into a cautionary tale which spells everything out completely. Thus the hearer's imagination cannot become active in giving the story a personal meaning. (*Little Red Cap* 171)

In Bettelheim's opinion, not only do stories have multiple meanings, but these meanings change in time as children's understanding of life matures (171). Bettelheim undertakes a psychoanalytical approach to Perrault's tale, and interprets the images present in the story as Freudian symbols of the young girl's sexual initiation: "It is this 'deathly' fascination with sex—which is experienced as simultaneously the greatest excitement and the greatest anxiety—that is bound up with the little girl's Oedipal longings for her father, and with the reactivation of these same feelings in different form during puberty" (179). It is interesting to note that Bettelheim was an early writer on autism who focused on child developmental psychology, yet overlooked the fact that Perrault described in detail symptoms of Mild Autism when sketching Little Red Riding Hood's behavioral profile.

If Bettelheim is interested in decoding symbolic images that, in his opinion, are employed by Perrault to express Little Red Riding Hood's sexual anxieties rooted in the Oedipal complex, Christine A. Jones and Jennifer Schacker focus on sexual politics and argue that Perrault's fairy tale presents us with the role that sex played in seventeenth-century political life. Rather than concentrating their analysis on Little Red Riding Hood's behavioral profile, Schacker and Jones choose to portray Little Red Riding Hood as a symbol of the wider social dynamics of the time that led to political marriages. According to the authors,

Perrault's fairy tale suggests that women were asked to get in bed with a particular type of wolf, thus becoming victims of social and sexual politics (30).

Moreover, rather than analyzing individual behavior in *Little Red Riding Hood*, Schacker and Jones choose to analyze society's "behavior" and, consequently, they blame the seventeenth-century educational practices for not helping young women understand lurking societal dangers. Lastly, the authors conclude that "the best a young woman can do is to understand the unavoidable dangers that surround her" (30). However, they do not explain *why* Perrault's young heroine struggles on an individual level with the understanding of actions that do not actually require formal instruction, but rather innate abilities such as intuition or emotional intelligence. We will note in the next section of this article that Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood–according to the behavioral profile that the author sketched for her—struggles with basic interpretation of intent and emotion that should signal developmental challenges, especially in the case of a young woman at a pubertal age.

As we have observed so far, some interpretations of Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood* address symbols connected to Freud's Oedipal complex or symbols and images representing the social condition of women in the seventeenth century. I will now posit that some interpretations approach the fairy tale from an even more general angle, thus linking the characters existent in Perrault's version with mythological figures. As Sandra Beckett states, the images as well as the meanings present in *Little Red Riding Hood* were and continue to be recycled throughout the centuries: "The famous fairy tale would be more fittingly categorized as a literature of 'inexhaustible possibility' since one can only marvel at the apparently endless and innovative ways in which *Little Red Riding Hood* has been recycled, and not only in a parodic mode, in recent decades" (*Recycling* xv). As follows, I bring into the discussion an interpretation that asserts the existence of similarities between certain popular mythological personages and the characters found in Perrault's fairy tale.

Hyacinthe Husson's study, titled *La chaîne traditionnelle,* claims that Perrault's heroine represents Aurora, the goddess of dawn: "Cette adolescente, au front couronné des lueurs de la lumière matinale, c'est une Aurore. L'Aurore en effet dans les hymnes védiques est représentée comme une jeune fille au corps sans tache ; elle est une messagère ; elle donne la nourriture ; en Grèce aussi Eos (l'Aurore) porte le surnom d'Angelieia, la Messagère" (7). Like Jennifer Schacker and Christine Jones's study, this interpretation also suggests that Little Red Riding Hood's fate is sealed. If Schacker and Jones affirmed that Perrault's heroine could not escape sexual politics, Husson states that the young Aurora cannot avoid her "death" as the dawn must always be swallowed by the sun which is represented by the wolf : "Tout en s'acheminant vers sa mère grand', c'est-à-dire vers les aurores qui l'ont précédée, la fillette au chaperon rouge est interceptée par le soleil *dévorateur* sous la forme d'un loup" (8). Based on Husson's interpretation, Little Red Riding Hood's individual behavior does not represent a subject that needs to be brought into discussion since the rhythms of nature must inevitably follow their course, thus predetermining Little Red Riding Hood's fate.

Unlike the above-mentioned interpretations of *Le petit chaperon rouge* that drift further and further from the detailed analysis of the heroine's individual behavior, my interpretation emphasizes the fact that Charles Perrault provides us with vivid descriptions of Little Red Riding Hood's actions that can easily help us elaborate her individual behavioral profile. In what follows, I will enumerate the main symptoms of ADHD listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - 4th edition* (DSM) and then I will compare them with the descriptions of Little Red Riding Hood's actions existing in Perrault's story. Consequently, we will observe that in this very short fairy tale there are a series of indicators that allow us to classify Perrault's heroine as an individual facing developmental challenges that make her particularly vulnerable during the encounter with the wolf.

Symptoms of ADHD in Le petit chaperon rouge

Inattention

According to the DSM manual, a person diagnosed with ADHD: "Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities" (83). In Perrault's story, the little girl fails to assess danger on her own when a wolf stops her on the way to her grandmother's house: "Il luy demanda où elle alloit; la pauvre enfant qui ne sçavoit pas qu'il est dangereux de s'arrester à écouter un Loup, luy dit, je vais voir ma Mere-grand, & luy porter une galette avec un petit pot de beurre que ma Mere luy envoye" (49-50). Not only does she fail to pay close attention to the dangerous change in her surroundings, but the girl also provides additional information that the stranger does not request. Little Red Riding Hood discloses the type of food that she carries to her grandmother, and now the stranger knows exactly what she carries as well as her precise itinerary. This is a mistake that will give the wolf the opportunity to better fool the grandmother who is probably expecting to hear the name of a familiar food item when her granddaughter knocks at the door: " – C'est votre fille le petit chaperon rouge, dit le Loup, en contrefaisant sa voix, qui vous apporte une galette, & un petit pot de beurre que ma Mere vous envoye" (51-52). All the clues voluntarily provided by Little Red Riding Hood help the wolf plan ahead and, even though it announces its plan to the little girl: " – Eh bien, dit le Loup, je veux l'aller voir aussi […]" (50), she continues to ignore the increasing danger.

Talking excessively and excessive motor activity

Another symptom mentioned by the DSM is the fact that an ADHD person "often talks excessively" (84). After providing extensive information on the items that she carries, Little Red Riding Hood answers the wolf's short question: "-Demeure-t-elle bien loin, luy dit le Loup?" (50) not with a vague yes or no, but with abundant details : "-Oh, ouy, dit le petit chaperon rouge, c'est par de-là le Moulin que vous voyez tout là-bas, là-bas, à la première maison du Village" (50). Little Red Riding Hood's mind seems to be racing and, as soon as the wolf finishes the questions, she is unable to stay quiet or to keep any secrets that could protect her from danger. She anxiously blurts out everything that comes to mind without allowing herself time to reflect on the possible consequences of her actions. The

DSM states that a person diagnosed with ADHD "often blurts out answers before questions have been completed" (84). Little Red Riding Hood's excessive talking is paired with excessive motor activity. As explained in the DSM, an ADHD individual "often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat, often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected, often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate (in adolescents or adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)" (84). Since Little Red Riding Hood is at the crossroads between childhood and puberty, she exhibits child-like behavior throughout the story as well as a certain restlessness that is more specific to adolescents.

Novelty and thrill

According to Edward Hallowell and John Ratey, ADHD and mild autistic people are fascinated by novel stimuli and they have "an inability to stop receiving messages" rather than "an inability to receive the right messages" (351). Additionally, the authors state that: "These people always feel a press for the next thing and the next thing and the next thing. The ADD individual is captive to the events of the external world." (351). Instead of focusing on the task assigned to her by her mother or on the fact that a stranger is heading to her sick grandmother's house, the young girl gets distracted by flowers and butterflies and gets off track: "Le Loup se mit à courir de toute sa force par le chemin qui estoit le plus court, & la petite fille s'en alla par le chemin le plus long, s'amusant à ceuïllir des noisettes, à courir aprés des papillons, et à faire des bouquets des petites fleurs qu'elle rencontroit"(50-51). The wolf instructs the girl to choose the longer route, a command that she obeys because it attracts with its novelty. After being distracted by the novel presence of the wolf, more new things appear on her path to distract her: hazelnuts, butterflies and flowers. She is moving from one task to another with no acknowledgement of the time passing by. She knows that her grandmother is sick and is waiting for food, but she cannot overcome her impulsiveness.

Edward Hallowell and John Ratey also mention the little attention that ADHD individuals pay to time and deadlines:

> Our patients frequently report that they are their most calm when completely caught up in the thrill of it all, whatever the 'all' may be. It could be fun, a catastrophe, or a life-or-death crisis. These situations allow the ADD person not only to get into forward motion, but also to forget, to disregard that they need breaks in the first place. (352-53)

Nature seems to be an overstimulating environment for the young girl as it triggers hyperactivity and an almost chaotic behavior. She runs in whichever direction attracts her attention without the ability to control her impulses and focus on reaching her sick grandmother.

Poor impulse control

The heroine's unpredictable actions, almost as if driven by an inner force, seem to be out of control, therefore upsetting societal expectations regarding

obedience. This unknown inner force is defined today as poor impulse control and the person who acts unpredictably is someone who seems 'driven by a motor'. According to the DSM manual, 'driven by a motor' refers to the inability to remain still or be quiet for long periods of time—which could also explain the girl's inability to stop listing information about her itinerary as well as about the food that she is carrying to her grandmother. The presence of all these symptoms described in the DSM manual strongly point to the fact that Little Red Riding Hood fits a certain psychological profile in Perrault's fairy tale—the one that can be classified today as ADHD.

If, during earlier centuries, the language addressing ADHD-like behavior was disapproving or critical, the language addressing ADHD symptoms in the twenty-first century changed dramatically, and researchers now refer to ADHD individuals as people who act differently and therefore need a personalized approach that avoids shaming, marginalization or correction—be it moral or physical:

> I see how important the human connection is every step of the way: connection with parent or spouse; with teacher or supervisor; with friend or colleague; with doctor, with therapist, with coach, with the world "out there". In fact, I see the human connection as the single most powerful therapeutic force in the treatment of ADHD. (xvii)

In the seventeenth century, a behavior that differed from what was considered socially appropriate could have easily been classified as disobedient. Nevertheless, Perrault's tale does not condemn the girl; it condemns her predator in an uncanny anticipation of twenty-first century sensitivity to behavioral vulnerabilities. I will now analyze episodes in *Le petit chaperon rouge* where ADHD and Mild Autism symptoms intermingle, therefore complicating interpretations of Little Red Riding Hood's seemingly naïve or disobedient behavior.

ADHD and Autism: Intersectionality

It is common for ADHD people to display a syndrome mix, meaning that they will show symptoms of ADHD along with symptoms of Mild Autism. If Severe Autism is easier to detect given its extreme and often debilitating aspect, Mild Autism requires a more subtle observation of behavior. Many people with Mild Autism have a high IQ, do not present speech difficulties, and will usually not resort to extreme repetitive behavior. However, they will still struggle with easily making connections with others, with reading intention/emotion, with some repetitive behavior especially when under stress, and they will also not understand the concept of dual identity existent in pretend play.

Eye contact and interpretation of intent and/or emotion

In *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*, Simon Baron-Cohen discusses the importance of paying attention to the eyes of another person:

> My guess is that we adults are aware, at some level, not only of how important eyes are to us but also of how infants seem attracted to them. They watch us blinking, they imitate this (Meltzoff 1990), and they turn to follow our direction of gaze (from 9 months or so). Our eyes give them a clue as to our target of attention; they also provide a clue to our interpretation of events, since our gaze is usually embedded within an emotional facial expression (of interest, pleasure, fear, surprise, disgust, anger, etc.) (119)

Baron-Cohen states that even infants are interested in decoding gaze as it is something connected to their survival instinct. They can catch emotions and respond to them by becoming sad or by smiling. Little Red Riding Hood is at least at her pubertal age since in the moral of the story the author implies that young men follow young ladies like Little Red Riding Hood and try to charm them. Consequently, at her age, we can assume that she should be able to focus on something more than the size of the wolf's eyes–merely a surface observation: "Ma mere-grand que vous avez de grands yeux!" (55). If autistic people can detect surface changes, they struggle with reading intent or emotion in other people. Perrault does not mention a single instance when Little Red Riding Hood is able to interpret intent. The popular argument of a naive young girl does not stand, since a naïve girl would have at least misinterpreted emotion or intention.

Little Red Riding Hood realizes that something is different, therefore she attempts to understand the current changes with the help of rational observations (size of the eyes, mouth, arms) as well as with the help of pattern finding. Since she cannot decode intent, the patterns that she observes become her only reliable sources of knowledge. Olga Bogdashina states: "It is true that autistic people lack ToM[9] and are 'mind-blind' to the thoughts, feelings and intentions of those around them. Non-autistic behaviors become unpredictable and confusing to an individual with autism" (12). After mentioning the inability of autistic people to read intent, Bogdashina draws awareness to the fact that non-autistic people also struggle to see the world through the eyes of autistic people, and therefore they tend to classify their behavior as atypical, odd or naive.

Game Over! Sarcasm and Pretend play

The wolf starts playing a game as soon as Little Red Riding Hood enters the room. He pretends to be Another and wears her grandmother's clothes to strengthen the make-believe. Autistic people, especially young ones, struggle with the concept of dual identity. According to Anne Alvarez:

> Normally developing children naturally acquire a set of increasingly sophisticated social and communication skills. They can imagine, pretend, interpret and recognize the feelings of others and detect intentions that are not communicated by speech alone. They come to know, and be interested in, when another person says one thing but means something else. They come to understand humor and irony. (2)

If most people understand that one can pretend to be Another for various reasons, in autistic minds these two concepts do not coexist; it is either one *or* the other: "Children with autism, in contrast, do not have rich inner worlds in which

experiences and phantasies can be stored ready for some lively interaction with others and where new thoughts can be stimulated by new experiences" (2). Given that the wolf is in the grandmother's house and in her bed, he must be the grandmother. However, Little Red Riding Hood still attempts to find an explanation for what she perceives as a slightly off-putting appearance. Especially when in a stressful situation, autistic people enter a loop of repetitive actions or acts of speech; consequently, we note that Little Red Riding Hood's observations follow the same repetitive pattern as she tries to make sense of changes that she thinks she observes: "-Ma mere-grand que vous avez de grands bras! […] -Ma mere-grand que vous avez de grandes jambes ! […] -Ma mere-grand que vous avez de grandes oreilles ! […] -Ma mere-grand que vous avez de grands yeux ! […] -Ma mere-grand que vous avez de grandes dents !" (54-55).

When the young girl utters her confusion by pointing out the surface physical changes that she struggles to explain, she does not receive clarification from the wolf. She senses that the situation is somewhat out-of-sync, but she needs further guidance to make sense of the changes in her grandmother's appearance. Little Red Riding Hood's incessant observations under the form of indirect questions are a cry for help, but the help does not arrive. On the contrary, she is told lies that do not clarify the changes that she is struggling to comprehend. Had the wolf not decided to end the questions by eating her, the questions would have probably continued to flow as the girl was attempting to make sense of the new unusual world. Hallowell and Ratey mention that ADHD symptoms can become harmful if the cries for help–sometimes salient, sometimes silent–are ignored and left untreated:

> More impairing than anxiety, more impairing than depression, more impairing than substance abuse. The 'morbidity' of untreated ADD is profound. Twenty-five percent of the prison population has undiagnosed ADD. Most of the kids in the juvenile justice system have untreated ADD. Traffic accidents are eight times more common than in the general population" (xv).

During the game played by the wolf, the young girl cannot manage to connect previous and current information. She does not associate the previous warnings offered by the wolf: "- Eh bien, dit le Loup, je veux l'aller voir aussi" (50) with the current differences in the physical aspect of the grandmother. The disguised and deceitfully kind language used by the wolf, such as "to hug you better, to listen to you better, to see you better" represents nothing other than masked future punishments. However, Little Red Riding Hood cannot comprehend the wolf's sarcasm. During this game, the wolf subtly suggests that some of the actions that he lists should be changes that Little Red Riding Hood should apply in order to survive–she should "listen better", "see better", and eventually "run better". Owing to the fact that she fails to recognize sarcasm, the game ends "c'est pour te manger!", and the incapacity to decode intent turns out to be deadly for Perrault's young heroine.

Findings, Limitations and Current Implications

Charles Perrault focuses on human behavior and mental states in *Le petit chaperon rouge*, and the pathological aspect of these conditions has not been analyzed so far possibly because it is difficult to assign a clear clinical diagnosis even when the patient is seen in person. However, when individuals display multiple symptoms that persist–just as the ones mentioned in this article–a possible pathological explanation should be brought into discussion given that an emphasis on this aspect could offer a new way to present the message of the story to young audiences. According to Bruno Bettelheim, when children read stories, they tend to identify with the character who resembles them the most: "The child identifies with the good hero not because of his goodness, but because the hero's condition makes a deep positive appeal to him. The question for the child is not 'Do I want to be good?' but 'Who do I want to be like?' The child decides this on the basis of projecting himself wholeheartedly into one character" (*Uses* 10).

Consequently, when a young ADHD/autistic audience hears about the characters as well as about the interpretations of this fairy tale still famous worldwide, they will relate to Little Red Riding Hood's character and to the way in which she is analyzed by readers while wondering what the future holds for them, too. Little Red Riding Hood's atypical way of perceiving the world triggers a violent death in the story that can scare children who display the same atypical behavior. They understand that the young girl dies as a result of not decoding the world through what is sometimes labeled as a "standard" method. However, a careful reading of this seventeenth-century fairy tale shows us that individuals pay attention to their surroundings, but some pay attention in a *different* manner. Without judgement and with great attention to details, we note that Perrault chose to present us with a specific behavioral type as the main character of his fairy tale.

In the *Moral* that accompanies *Le petit chaperon rouge*, Perrault never states that Little Red Riding Hood was deserving of punishment or death, he only brings to our attention his concern for her fate as well as for the fate of other young people who display the same distracted behavior. Despite a lack of specialized medical terms for ADHD or Autism, Perrault did not lack insight into behavioral and mental health, and in the seventeenth century he recorded an early description of a young person requiring personalized attention. In the twenty-first century, researchers such as Barry Prizant focus on the growing need to provide personalized attention in the case of certain behavioral and mental conditions: "Autism isn't an illness. It's a different way of being human. Children with autism aren't sick; they are progressing through developmental stages as we do. To help them, we don't need to change them or fix them. We need to work to understand them, and then change what *we* do" (4). If the only method of analyzing this fairy tale relies solely on the moral aspect of a person's actions without considering a possible pathological explanation, then the interpretation of this story will be ignoring the rich nuances observed and described in detail by Charles Perrault when narrating Little Red Riding Hood's behavior. Consequently, rather than reading Little Red Riding Hood's actions only through a moral lens, this article invites a more in-depth, pathological analysis of her behavior and mental state that

takes into account not an appropriate or inappropriate, but rather a different manner of interpreting the world.

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Notes

[1] Hyacinthe Husson, *La chaîne traditionnelle* ; André Lefèvre, *Les contes de Charles Perrault* ; Bruno Bettelheim, *Little Red Cap and the Pubertal Girl* ; Christine A. Jones & Jennifer Schacker, *Marvelous Transformations : An Anthology of Fairy Tales and Contemporary Critical Perspectives* ; Sandra Beckett, *Recycling Red Riding Hood* – all these interpretations, with the exception of Lefèvre's, will be addressed in detail in this article.

[2] See the Grimms's 1812 version *Rotkäppchen.*

[3] Jennifer Schacker & Christine A. Jones' study *Marvelous Transformations* investigates sexual politics in Perrault's *Le petit chaperon rouge.*

[4] See Charles Perrault's 1697 *Le petit chaperon rouge.*

[5] That is, some men will sweet talk and prey on young girls.

[6] The original version of this fairy tale is titled *Ches ! Eotteohge alassji? Honjaseo gileul gadaga yugoebeomeul mulrichin bbalganmoja iyagi* and it is written by Mia Sim (2010). In this article, I am using the English translation provided in Sandra Beckett's *Revisioning Red Riding Hood around the World: An Anthology of Retellings* (2014).

[7] The mother's teachings are depicted as magical, as they are recalled by the heroine exactly when they can make a difference between life and death.

[8] In this version, the wolf is not depicted as the villain despite his scary appearance. However, the Frog Prince, the Three Little Pigs as well as the Cat in the car represent the villains, and the heroine intuitively seems to be able to tell that they want to harm her.

[9] ToM = Theory of Mind (the ability to decode what other people think or intend to do).

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